Nine Chon

THE MUNICH DRAMA

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DRAMA

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INTRODUCTION

Among the many events which finally led to the tragedy of the Second World War, Munich occupies a place of its own. This complex and contradictory action fully deserves to be condemned as one of the most shameful in the history of Western diplomacy, above all the diplomacy of Britain and France. By opening the doors to fascist aggression in Europe, the Munich agreement was largely responsible for the fact that Europe, and later the whole world, was drawn into the most bloody of all wars in the history of mankind.

Since that time the "heroes" of Munich and their apologists have spun a thick web of all kinds of falsehoods in the attempt to conceal or at least to mitigate the guilt of those whose political bankruptcy was the cause of this great diplomatic disaster.

One more attempt has been made in Britain recently to rescue the chief architect of Munich–Neville Chamberlain–from the line of fire. Lord Butler, a former Cabinet minister, who has had a lot to do with foreign affairs in his time and was Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs during the Munich period, has published extracts from his memoirs in the London *Times.* In the issue dated May 18, 1971, Lord Butler did his best

to demonstrate that Chamberlain was not in fact guilty of anything whatever. The former British Prime Minister, Lord Butler assures his readers, quite sincerely wanted to avert the threat of war but was prevented from carrying out that noble intention by the European situation. Two main obstacles, it is claimed, upset Chamberlain's plans: "the collapse of French morale" and "the uncertainty of Russia's position". In these circumstances, writes Lord Butler, the former Prime Minister had no alternative but to act as he did.

It is not my job to analyse the conduct of the French Government during the days of Munich. But as far as the position of the Soviet Government is concerned, this was well known to me as Soviet Ambassador to Britain from 1932 to 1943, and I am in a position to say that Butler gives an altogether incorrect picture of it.

The Times of June 8, 1971, printed a short reply from me to Lord Butler's version of things. False accounts of the Munich events are, however, so common in Western literature that I feel I have a political duty to go into greater detail on the subject of this shameful action, especially as the post I then occupied enabled me to observe the processes taking place on the European scene, and to be on the inside of events which led first to Munich and subsequently to the Second World War.

The last chapter of Munich has yet to be closed. The Federal German Republic, although it now acknowledges the integrity and individuality of present-day Czechoslovakia, nevertheless refuses to recognise that the Munich 'settlement' was invalid from the very beginning, which is the position insisted upon by the Czechoslovak Socialist

Republic and the other Warsaw Treaty states. The thought of redrawing postwar borders by means of aggression still gnaws at certain political forces in Europe. True, in present conditions they are obliged to keep this idea in the background, and sometimes to disguise themselves as pacifists. But this should not blunt the vigilance of people of goodwill.

I consider my book to be the contribution, it is within my power to make, to the fight for peace, for the deplorable experience of Munich is an instructive story about the highly tragic consequences that result from political cowardice and lack of principle, and from attempts to "appease" an aggressor. Consequently I am deeply convinced that the Munich events should be studied with the keenest attention not only by professional historians but by every thinking person on our planet who is interested in preventing further bloodshed.

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN

I begin my story with a profile of Neville Chamberlain, for there is not the shadow of doubt–and with political hindsight this becomes especially clear–that it was this man who occupied the post of British Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940, who was the principal architect of Munich.

That does not mean, of course, that Neville Chamberlain was solely responsible for the Munich policy in England. The foreign policy of a bourgeois state results from the activities of class forces which find expression through specific groupings and individuals. That was the case with Munich. There were many others acting in the same spirit as Neville Chamberlain on the political scene in Britain–Stanley Baldwin, his predecessor as Prime Minister; Sir John Simon, former Foreign Secretary, who headed one of the most reactionary groups in British ruling circles; Geoffrey Dawson, the extremely influential editor of *The Times;* Kingsley Wood, Samuel Hoare and other Cabinet ministers; Lady Astor, with her highly reactionary Cliveden set... Nevertheless the leader of the social class forces that were then ruling Britain was Neville Chamberlain. Since, for good measure he had a most energetic and ob-

stinate character, it was he who exerted the greatest influence on British policy at the time.

Who was Neville Chamberlain? And what did he stand for?

Biographies of Neville Chamberlain [1] provide adequate grounds for considering him a dyed-in-the-wool member of the British bourgeoisie—and precisely of the bourgeoisie, not the landed aristocracy. The Chamberlain family, whose history can be traced back to the mid-seventeenth century, were for nearly two hundred years engaged in bootmaking from one generation to the next. The life of the family proceeded according to strictly established practices and traditions. During the century preceding the advent of any representative of the family onto the political scene in Britain (of which more will be said later), the eldest Chamberlain boy in each generation had to bear the name Joseph, had to engage in bootmaking (although in various forms), and had to become a churchwarden of St. Lawrence Jewry in London. On the proper days the family kept church and royal holidays, and at the proper times they gave great dinners which were renowned for their abundance of courses and also for the fact that the pudding was served before the meat. In a document dating to the beginning of last century, the Chamberlain family was described as "commercial people of the highest stamp". Such a family was eminently worthy of Dickens's pen.

But in the mid-nineteenth century a revolution

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[1] See, for instance, Keith Felling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, London, 1946; Iain Macleod, *Neville Chamberlain*, London, 1961.

took place in the family history. The last of the Josephs, who was then head of the family, proved to be a man who did not altogether conform to type (his mother is said to have been responsible for this). First, he refused to have anything to do with bootmaking, and while still a young man became a partner in a factory producing iron screws, which meant he had to move from London to Birmingham. Second, in the middle of the seventies, having acquired considerable wealth, he sold his business and threw himself into politics, in which he carved out a brilliant career. This last of the Josephs, in a complex and contradictory advance from Radical to last-ditch Conservative, was that same Joseph Chamberlain who at the turn of the century became Colonial Secretary and published the book *Imperial Union and Tariff Reform,* a real gospel of British imperialism.

Among the children of this scion of the Chamberlain family who cast the old traditions overboard were two sons, born of different mothers (Joseph Chamberlain was married three times). In defiance of tradition, neither of them was given the name Joseph. The elder was christened Austen, and later became an eminent politician, occupying, among other posts, that of Foreign Secretary; his name was closely linked with the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Britain and the Soviet Union in 1927. The younger boy was given the name Neville, and as his father considered him not particularly bright and unfitted for politics he was at the outset put into business. At the age of 21, therefore, Neville was the owner of quite a large plantation in the Bahamas. But he displayed no ability whatever as a businessman and in six years returned to his native Birmingham having

concluded his initiation into colonialism with big losses.

That was at the very end of last century. By that time Birmingham was already a big centre of the iron and steel industry and engineering. Neville Chamberlain became a shareholder in a copper mining enterprise, and later in a factory manufacturing metal bunks for the navy, and after that acquired an interest in an enterprise making small arms. He displayed no particular talent here, either, but as a member of a wealthy family and a son of Joseph Chamberlain, Neville was elected to the Birmingham City Council in 1911, and to the position of Lord Mayor of the city in 1915.

Appetite comes with eating. Having risen to the most eminent position in the city, Neville now considered it was time to enter politics. At first things did not go altogether smoothly, but the fact that he was from an influential family opened up the road to success. In 1918 he became an M.P., and then, clambering higher and higher up the ladder of position and honours, in 1931 he received the portfolio of Chancellor of the Exchequer—considered to be the highest post in the Cabinet and generally looked upon as the stepping stone to the premiership. This naturally gave Chamberlain quite a fillip, and enabled him to put through one of the most considerable undertakings of his career; under his aegis Britain abandoned Free Trade and went over to Protectionism—in fact he carried out the tariff reform his father had made such strenouos efforts to get adopted thirty years earlier.

This was the peak of Neville Chamberlain's career. Had he chosen that moment to retire from active political life and assume the mantle of

Grand Old Man of the Conservative Party he would, in the eyes of the British bourgeoisie, have won for himself a place of honour in the Parliamentary annals of Britain. He did not want to do this, however, and consequently his name has gone down in history as a symbol of a catastrophe on a vast scale, not only for himself and for the class that put him forward but—and this is incomparably more important—for his country and for the whole of mankind. More of that later.

This is the answer to the first question: who was Neville Chamberlain?

Now for the second question: what kind of man was he?

From all I saw myself and heard from others during my years as Ambassador in London, I arrived at the conclusion that Nature had given Neville Chamberlain three principal qualities: a small mind, great energy, and the pigheadedness that stems from a narrow outlook. Such a mixture is highly dangerous in a man at the helm of state, and Neville Chamberlain's activities as a statesman, especially in the last period of his life, are undeniable confirmation of this.

Once as we were talking, Lloyd George said to me: "What is Neville? In outlook he is just a provincial manufacturer of iron bedsteads!"

Churchill was even more outspoken. In private conversations we had, he called Neville "a fool", and when at the end of the thirties the Prime Minister staked everything on a war breaking out between nazi Germany and the USSR, Churchill exclaimed: "What an idiot! He thinks he can ride the tiger!"

According to Anthony Eden, on the eve of

Neville's appointment as head of the British Government, Austen Chamberlain warned his brother: "Neville, you must remember you don't know anything about foreign affairs [1]."

My personal impression throughout the eight years I was obliged to come in contact with Neville Chamberlain in the course of my work led me to the conclusion that he was an extremely limited individual and totally unfitted for diplomacy. I clearly recollect our first talk, in November 1932, when he was Chancellor. As the newly appointed Ambassador I paid him a courtesy visit. During our conversation various economic matters came up and Chamberlain began to reproach the Soviet Union, claiming that it sold a great deal to Britain but bought little, and used the surplus to place orders in Germany. I replied that the Soviet Government was acting like a good merchant: it was selling where it was profitable to sell and buying where it was advantageous to buy.

"But why do you consider," Chamberlain asked, "that it is more advantageous to buy in Germany?"

"There is a very simple reason," I replied. "The Germans, unlike yourselves, give us a five-year credit."

The Chancellor's face suddenly changed. He turned round sharply towards me in his armchair and in a spiteful tone said:

"Do you really want us to give long-term credits to our enemy? No, we can put our money to better use."

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[1] *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden. Facing the Dictators*, London, 1962, p. 502.

In the same tone as Chamberlain had used I replied: "I want exactly nothing, Mr. Chancellor, I have not come to you for credits at all... You asked me why the Soviet Union placed orders primarily with Germany. I answered you. That was all."

I must admit that at that moment I was glad that Chamberlain had shown his true colours with such frankness. At any rate, now I knew exactly who I was dealing with. But as I left the Chancellor's office I involuntarily thought: "Well, and what a poor diplomat you are."

So my opinion of Neville Chamberlain coincided completely with that expressed by his brother, although at the time I was not aware of it.

The years that followed only strengthened my first impression. A tall, thin man with a bright patch of silver gray in the black cap of his hair (I do not know whether this was nature or chemistry at work), an uninteresting individual, unsociable, with no talent for oratory, no sense of humour and none of that personal charm so vital to a politician, he was simply the incarnation of unfitness for work in the sphere of foreign affairs.

Furthermore, Neville Chamberlain was extremely conservative and highly dogmatic in thought and deed. Any fresh winds, new currents and forms of life were accepted by him with difficulty. He himself said: "I am a man of the nineteenth century, when there were no cars or telephones." Even a fountain-pen was an instrument of torture to Chamberlain. His heart was really in business (remember that his father considered him unsuited to politics). Above all, he was a

merchant, and when fate thrust him into the position of Prime Minister he was firmly convinced that the best recipe for success in the international sphere was the application of commercial methods to foreign policy.

I recall another curious talk with Neville Chamberlain. About two months after his appointment as Prime Minister I visited him in my capacity as Soviet Ambassador and asked him to inform me of the basic lines of the foreign policy of the Government headed by him. In reply he spent a long time explaining to me in detail that the main problem at the moment was Germany. This question had to be settled first of all, and then the rest would not present any special difficulty. But how was the German problem to be settled? The Prime Minister believed this was quite possible if only the correct method were adopted. The whole point was the method. What had been done by British diplomacy so far was quite unsuitable, and that was why it had been so unsuccessful. Chamberlain was going to change all that, he said. Then, as if thinking aloud, the Prime Minister declared eagerly: "If only I could sit down at the table with Hitler and with pencil in hand could go through all his complaints and claims, I think this would bring us very close to reconciliation. . ."

The Prime Minister's ideas on foreign policy were as primitive as that. As I went away I thought once again: "Well, and what a poor diplomat you make!"

It was a man of such a character that the British ruling class put at the head of government at such an extraordinarily crucial moment in history.

THE HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Chamberlain naturally did not live in a vacuum, but in definite historical circumstances. What were they?

I cannot here go into details about the principal reasons for the situation that developed in capitalist Europe towards the end of the thirties.[1] It will be enough to say that 1933 was a watershed between two different periods of the epoch separating the Second World War from the First. The first period, which lasted for fourteen years (1919-1932), was that of the so-called Versailles Europe, when the "masters" were the victors of the First World War, and Germany, bound by the chains of Versailles, was a defeated country where owing to the stupid and contradictory policy of the Western Powers a savage nationalism of a revanchist trend gained the upper hand. The second period, covering seven years (1933-1939), was the period of the speedy decline of Versailles Europe and the transformation of Germany into an aggressive nazi state.

Such a course of events threatened simultaneously the Soviet Union, at whose expense Hitler was preparing to solve the problem of *lebensraum*, and the Western Powers, especially France and Britain, to whose colonial possessions German imperialism was stretching out its greedy hands. One would have thought that the most natural and sensible means of countering nazi aggression would have been the setting up of a defensive alliance consisting of the USSR, Britain and France.

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[1] I spoke of this in detail in my *Reminiscences of a Soviet Ambassador*, Moscow, 1964, Vol. 2.

A plan for such an alliance was persistently advanced by the Soviet Government. It was supported by the cleverest and most farsighted politicians, men like Churchill and Eden in Britain, and Paul-Boncour, Barthou and Herriot in France. But the overwhelming majority of the representatives of the ruling classes in both countries, grouped around the Cliveden set in Britain and the Two Hundred Families in France, were so blinded by class hatred for the country of socialism that they were determined to keep away from any more serious contacts with the "Bolsheviks". Consequently it was impossible to form a coalition against nazi aggression.

The Cliveden set, which gathered in the salon of Lady Astor (the head of the set was Neville Chamberlain), made an attempt to manipulate history. They put forward the notorious idea of "Western security," which was in essence anti-Soviet and boiled down to using fascist dictators, above all, Hitler, as a battering ram against the USSR.

Hitler, reasoned the representatives of the Cliveden set, has to fight somewhere and secure *lebensraum* for Germany. So let him do this in Eastern Europe and carve himself out new possessions in the Ukraine and the Caucasus. As for us, Britain and France, we shall stand aside and not only shall we not get in his way, on the contrary, we shall give him every possible help apart from armed intervention on his behalf in war. In the process of the war in the East, Germany and the USSR will bleed each other to death and, for at least a generation, both threats to the British empire will be removed: the fascist military threat and the communist political one. Then Bri-

tain and France (with the support of the USA) will appear as fresh forces on the European scene and will dictate the peace terms that suit them. If for the sake of success in this great game with Hitler it becomes necessary to sacrifice our own interests in a particular part of Europe or the fate of some small country, well then, we shall have to tolerate this: after all, robbers always have to be paid for their services.

This was the historical background upon which Neville Chamberlain traced the patterns of his policy when he became Prime Minister. This was the historical situation in which the Munich drama unfolded. The roots of the situation go back to Locarno, where plans for struggle against the Soviet Union were worked out and from which, in a little more than fifteen years, the anti-Soviet conception of "Western security" emerged.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MUSSOLINI

On May 28, 1937, Chamberlain became British Prime Minister having taken the place of Stanley Baldwin, who had resigned. He came to power with the mood of one endowed with a messianic mission. The successes of previous years, which had enabled Chamberlain to rise from rank and file M.P. to the post of head of the British government, finally went to his head. Now he considered that it was no accident but that the will of fate, even the will of providence, had destined him for the accomplishment of great deeds. Chamberlain considered himself "the prophet of peace"

who would lead mankind (that is, the Western countries) from the valley of agitation and alarm and establish calm and prosperity. How? By what means? Chamberlain was convinced that he would find them along the road of that "new diplomacy," of which he had spoken to me during our last meeting ("...If only I could sit down at the table with Hitler and with pencil in hand could go through all his complaints and claims...").

Chamberlain's main aim, of course, was to achieve agreement with Hitler, but evidently conscious of the difficulty and complexity of such a task, he decided to make sure of success by accomplishing first a similar but easier task–the "pacification of the Italian dictator." Consequently, in mid-August 1937 the British Prime Minister sent a friendly letter to Mussolini in which he proposed the rapid settlement of all differences in Anglo-Italian relations. Mussolini naturally replied to the British Premier in the most polite and promising terms. Thus opened the Chamberlain-Mussolini "romance", which on April 16, 1938, culminated in the signing of an agreement of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, who came to Chamberlain's Cabinet from that of Baldwin, believed that Mussolini should pay for such a treaty by ending Italian intervention in Spain. Since this did not happen, there was a sharp conflict between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, which ended on February 20, 1938, with the demonstrative resignation of Eden.

Since, however, British public opinion was obviously worried by Chamberlain's deal with Mussolini, the British Prime Minister was forced

to promise that the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 16, 1938, would be ratified only after Mussolini had withdrawn his troops from Spain in the manner envisaged by the resolutions on the matter passed by the Non-Intervention Committee, which was then sitting in London. This promise was given in spring 1938, before Munich. Six months later, by now after Munich, Chamberlain had become so enthusiastic about "appeasing" fascist dictators that in November 1938 he ratified the agreement with Mussolini without keeping his promise of the spring.

At the same time Chamberlain took resolute steps to turn the Foreign Office into an apparatus subservient to himself. Eden's resignation made this very much easier. But there was one man in the Foreign Office who stood in Chamberlain's way—this was the Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Vansittart, an energetic supporter of a Triple Alliance of Britain, France and the USSR, who plaved an important role both by virtue of his official position [1] and because of his personal qualities. On January 1, 1938, Vansittart was appointed Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the British Government, that is he was formally promoted and given an honoured, but purely decorative title. In his place the considerably more tractable Cadogan became Permanent Under-Secretary.

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[1] In the British Civil Service hierarchy the Permanent Under-Secretary of each department is the head of the office and does not change with changes of Ministers, who are appointed by Parliament, that is by a party-controlled government. The role and influence of such a Permanent Under-Secretary, who is a great expert in his field, is naturally tremendous.

Not satisfied with this, Chamberlain drew Sir Horace Wilson closer to him–he was Chief Industrial Adviser to the British Government. I knew him very well from the negotiations on the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement in 1934. He was dyed-in-the-wool reactionary who considered that the world consisted entirely of fools and scoundrels and that they could be governed only by appealing to their basest instincts. In foreign policy Sir Horace was at the level of the average man in the street. But it was he who became Chamberlain's chief adviser on international affairs, the one to whose words the Prime Minister listened far more than to opinion of the Foreign Office.

After Eden, Lord Halifax, who shared the Prime Minister's views and was a member of the Cliveden set, became Foreign Secretary. He was a man of a philosophical-mystical turn of mind of whom it was said that during his service as Viceroy of India he built behind his office a small chapel to which he would repair to seek "enlightenment from above" before any important meeting or talks.

Having thus set the political and administrative stage for action, Chamberlain went right ahead with his main operation–"Operation Hitler".

DEFERRING TO HITLER

Chamberlain's approach to Hitler was somewhat more complex than his approach to Mussolini. This time he did not send a friendly letter but a friendly individual, so far, "on a private basis."

He was Lord Halifax, who was not yet Foreign Secretary but occupied the purely decorative post of Deputy Prime Minister. In order to maintain the "private" character of the meeting, an appropriate form was devised. An international hunting exhibition was being held in Berlin and Lord Halifax was invited, along with others, to take part in it as "Master of the Fox Hounds". In November 1937 Halifax left for Germany, and there he had a meeting with Hitler. At it the two men exchanged opinions on a whole number of major international questions of the day. A record of the talk, which was held on November 19, 1937, was found among other diplomatic documents captured by Soviet troops during the storming of Berlin and later published by the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [1]

During this talk the "Führer" was extremely outspoken and even raised the question of colonies. Halifax, as befits an English Lord, couched his answer in vague hypocritical phrases from which, however, Hitler had little difficulty in drawing concrete conclusions. The essence of Halifax's statements was that the British Government was ready to conclude an alliance with Germany on the basis of a four-power pact (Britain, France, Germany and Italy) and to give Germany a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe. Halifax declared that no possibility of changing the existing situation in Europe should be ruled out, and later clarified the point, saying that this applied to Danzig, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Naturally, the English Lord did not fail to add a pious

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[1] *Documents and Materials of the Eve of the Second World War*, Moscow, 1948, Vol. 1, pp. 10-48.

reservation to the effect that all the projected changes must be brought about "by way of peaceful evolution", and in such a manner that "methods which might involve further upheavals could be avoided", but Hitler, with the intuition of an international bandit, understood Halifax's real meaning perfectly well. It was clear to him that Britain and France were not going to fight with Germany over Austria or Czechoslovakia. The green light was given for aggression in Central Europe and Hitler decided to lose no time.

On February 20, 1938, Eden resigned. A few days afterwards Lord Halifax took his place. In the diary I kept while I was Soviet Ambassador in Britain, there is an entry dated March 1, 1938:

"Today Halifax received all the Ambassadors in turn. Monck (head of the Protocol Department)... warned each of us that we had ten of fifteen minutes... In view of the shortness of the time at my disposal I put just two questions to Halifax: about Spain and Central Europe."

Leaving aside the first question, I will only quote Halifax's answer to the second: "Britain considers she has an interest in this part of Europe, but she cannot commit herself at all in advance. Everything will depend on the circumstances."

It was a position that seemed to be specially created in order to tempt Hitler and provoke him to aggression...

THE FALL OF AUSTRIA

On March 12, 1938, Hitler carried out his lightning annexation of Austria. As if wanting to

scoff at Chamberlain, he carried out this act of banditry on precisely the day when the British Prime Minister received Ribbentrop, the former German Ambassador, at an official luncheon in London–Ribbentrop had just been appointed Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The alarmed Halifax asked Ribbentrop for an explanation, and the latter hastened to "calm" his colleague by stating that the solution of the "Austrian problem" was a very good thing. Hitler after all, was only trying to unite all Germans within the borders of the Third Reich. Now, this had been done, and the door was open for Anglo-German friendship. Ribbentrop's explanation evidently satisfied the British Government, for it reacted to this highly scandalous act of aggression with no more than paper protests. The French Government acted in the same way. The talk between Hitler and Halifax in November had brought its first fruits.

After this Hitler and Goebbels began to give persistent assurances to the whole world that their final aim was "the assembly" of the German nation under one state roof, and that as soon as this was accomplished, the Third Reich would become a peaceful, tranquil and respectable state. The Cliveden set joyfully took up this hypocritical assurance of the Führer. I remember having a talk with Lord Lothian, subsequently British Ambassador to the United States, soon after the annexation of Austria. In reply to my criticism of the way the British Government had behaved over the Austrian question, the respected Lord said: "Hitler only wants self-determination for the German nation. Doesn't your government share this principle?"

Lothian did not want to listen to any of my arguments. It was quite apparent that he wanted the fascist dictator to lead him by the nose.

But whereas in London and Paris official circles believed or pretended to believe Hitler's soothing assurances, in Moscow no illusions were harboured on this point. On March 17 Maxim Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, gave a press interview on behalf of the Soviet Government in which he sharply condemned German aggression and emphasised that now Czechoslovakia was in jeopardy. Consequently, in the name of the Soviet Government, he proposed an immediate discussion inside or outside the League of Nations on the question of measures capable of halting the further development of aggression. On instructions from Moscow I handed the text of the interview to the British Government with an accompanying note which stated that what Litvinov had said expressed the views of the Soviet Government. The same thing was done by the Soviet Ambassadors in Paris and Washington. What was the reaction of the Western powers to so reasonable an initiative on the part of the Soviet Union?

On March 24 I received from Halifax a long note which stated that the British Government "would warmly welcome the assembly of an international conference, at which it might be expected that all European States... would consent to be represented"—that is aggresors and non-aggressors!

At the same time the British Government objected to the convening of "a conference only attended by some of the European powers, and designed... to organise concerted action against ag-

gression," for in the view of His Majesty's Government such a conference would not necessarily help peace in Europe. [1]

That meant that instead of struggle against the aggressors, there were to be fruitless talks with them! In other words drops of soothing syrup for the great mass of the people so that the aggressors would have time to prepare for fresh acts of aggression. That was what Chamberlain wanted!

The reaction of Paris and Washington to the Soviet note was no better than that of London.

THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN CRISIS

The warning given by the Soviet Government was more than timely. Hardly had Hitler devoured Austria than the atmosphere in Europe was again raised to fever pitch. This time it was Czechoslovakia that was threatened. It was true that at the time of the Austrian annexation Goering had three times sworn to A. Mastny, the Czechoslovak envoy in Berlin, that his country was not in the slightest danger from Germany. [2] But at the same time Goebbels was acting in contrary fashion. He was howling furiously all over Europe about the bitter fate of the three million Germans in the Sudetan region of Czechoslovakia. They also, it seemed, belonged to the German nation. They

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[1] *Documents on British Foreign Policy (1919-1939).* Third Series, Vol. 1, London, 1949, p. 101.

[2] A. Rothstein. *The Munich Conspiracy,* London, 1958, p. 53.

were subjected to all kinds of oppression from the Czechs. They also, it appeared, had to be reunited with their natural fatherland–the Third Reich–as soon as possible.

This obvious preparation for a fresh act of aggression by nazi Germany aroused great perturbation in the West. There was a particularly sharp reaction in France, for that country was linked with Czechoslovakia by the Mutual Aid Pact of 1925, and in the event of Germany attacking Czechoslovakia she was under an obligation to come to the support of her ally by force of arms. In French ruling circles there had for a long time been vacillation about the way France would behave in the event of danger to Czechoslovakia; the majority, however, were still in favour of fulfilling their obligations. This brought into prominence the question of Britain's behaviour in such a situation.

Under pressure from France Chamberlain was obliged to arrange in London on April 28-29 an emergency meeting of the Ministers of the two powers. France, which was represented by Premier Edouard Daladier and Georges Bonnet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, tried to get from the British Government an unequivocal assurance that if she took action against Germany, Britain would support France by all means in her power, even to the extent of open participation in war. Chamberlain, however, behaved so ambiguously and vaguely that he undermined the faith of his closest partners (and in fact, allies) in Britain's reliability. It is no exaggeration to say that this meeting marked the starting point among top ruling circles in France of the process which five months later led to the French Government's refusal to

carry out its obligations to Czechoslovakia. Another quite important contributory factor was the appointment of Bonnet, one of the most sinister figures then on the horizon of the Third Republic, as French Foreign Minister in April 1938.

The attitude adopted by Chamberlain at the Anglo-French meeting was due to the fact that the Prime Minister had already and definitively reached a conclusion which can be formulated approximately this way: peace with Hitler at any price, and consequently. . . Czechoslovakia must be forced to capitulate to Hitler.

But Chamberlain not only thought that way, he also spoke his thoughts—and in the most inappropriate circumstances. Early in May an American correspondent in London with whom I was on good terms told me that a few days earlier the Prime Minister had spoken at an unofficial luncheon given by Lady Astor for American and Canadian journalists at her home. The essence of Chamberlain's speech on that occasion was as follows: neither France nor the Soviet Union, and even less Britain, would fight over Czechoslovakia; Czechoslovakia could not continue to exist in her present form; Britain's policy was that the Sudetenland should be handed over peacefully to Hitler and after that a four-power pact concluded.

Close colleagues of Chamberlain spoke even more frankly: not long before that luncheon the British Minister of War declared in a confidential talk with American correspondents that Czechoslovakia's fate had been decided in advance: Germany would become sated in Central Europe before the West was be able to stop her.

The Germans, of course, were among those who got to hear about the views expressed in these speeches. The line of thought of the British Prime Minister and his colleagues could only lend wings to the fascist aggressors. Hitler decided that the moment had come for the next leap. For one thing, he sent to London Henlein, the Sudeten German leader [1] who was trying to present himself and his nazi movement as genuine representatives of common sense, ready to accept the most sensible compromise with the Czechoslovak Government. Thanks to the protest made by the Czechoslovak envoy in London, Jan Masaryk, Chamberlain did not receive Henlein, but influential figures close to the Prime Minister conducted lengthy and serious talks with him; Churchill, Eden, Vansittart and others talked with Henlein in order to find out what he wanted. At the same time, Hitler started a frenzied campaign against Czechoslovakia and in the middle of May moved several divisions up to her borders. He was waiting for France and the USSR, which had mutual aid pacts with Czechoslovakia to repudiate their obligations, for Britain to occupy a neutral position, and for the Prague Government in this situation to submit to him without a single shot. But disappointment was in store for the Führer.

Having received negative replies to all their March proposals that an urgent conference be called to seek measures for combating aggression, the Soviet Union did not sit idle. At the end of April a meeting was held in the Kremlin at which

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[1] Konrad Henlein was the leader of the Sudeten German Party. This organisation was a lightly camouflaged branch of the German Nazi Party.

it was decided to draw the attention of the Czechoslovak Government to the fact that the USSR was ready to take in cooperation with France and Czechoslovakia all measures (including military measures) to ensure Czechoslovakia's security if it were asked to do so.[1] Giving a report on the international situation, Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, stated that although the Soviet-Czechoslovak Mutual Aid Pact made Soviet assistance to Czechoslovakia dependent upon French aid, "the pact did not forbid each of the sides coming to the other's assistance without waiting for France".[2] This, naturally, encouraged Czechoslovakia considerably and had a certain influence on the positions of France and Britain. It is true that on May 7, on the instructions of their governments, Newton, the British envoy in Prague, and de Lacroix, the French Minister, put strong pressure on the Czechoslovak Government, demanding that it go as far as possible in yielding to Germany; nevertheless, ten to twelve days later Chamberlain and Daladier had to make a protest to Hitler against his predatory intentions. At the same time the Czechoslovak Government with 40 well armed divisions at its disposal, declared a partial mobilisation of its army.

All this had a sobering effect on Hitler and he decided to retreat for the time being. On May 23 Ribbentrop assured the Czechoslovak envoy in Berlin A. Mastny that Germany had no hostile designs in relation to his country, and the anti-

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[1] *New Documents from the History of Munich*, Moscow, 1958, p. 26.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Czech campaign initiated by Goebbels died down. At the same time, however, Hitler gave instructions: 1) to Henlein—to create a smokescreen by entering into negotiations with the Czechoslovak Government on the settlement of the "Sudeten question"; 2) to the German army command—to prepare for armed aggression against Czechoslovakia by October 1, 1938.

ON THE ROAD TO MUNICH

One might imagine that the events of May 19-23 would have demonstrated quite clearly to the Western powers the significance of collective security in the struggle against fascist aggression. After the experience of May one would think they should have declared firmly to Hitler: so far and no farther! or better still that they should have taken the hand extended to them by the USSR and by joint efforts of the three powers put Hitler Germany in its place. If in May Hitler had been forced back simply by the uncoordinated diplomatic *démarches* of Britain, France and the USSR, then now, faced with three united great powers (and with the prospect of the eventual use of one or another non-diplomatic means) he would of course not risk pushing ahead. But to achieve this Britain would have to engage in joint activity with the USSR, and that was something Chamberlain did not want at all! Furthermore, he was afraid of spoiling his "great" game with Hitler. In view of the anti-Soviet interests of British ruling circles,

whose spokesman he was, Chamberlain could not take such a step.

What was France's position? In character Daladier, the French Premier, was like a reed painted in simulation of steel. In the event of any complications or dangers he usually began with the high notes and threatening gestures, but very soon ran out of breath and gradually slid down into a cowardly minor key. Bonnet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was an out and out reactionary, and political adventurer. Admiral Darlan, who commanded the French navy, was a narrow-minded chauvinist and clung to an extreme right-wing political orientation. One of his ancestors, a seaman, was killed in the famous Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and even a century later, Darlan could not forgive either Nelson or the British in general for this. It was obvious that Darlan was anti-British. General Weygand, one of the biggest military figures in France of the day, was a man who was spiritually bankrupt. In his war memoirs Churchill wrote of Weygand: "He had a profound, lifelong dislike of the Parliamentary regime of the Third Republic. As an ardently religious Catholic, he saw in the ruin which had overwhelmed his country (here the military catastrophe of 1940 is meant–*I.M.*) the chastisement of God for its abandonment of the Christian faith." [1]

This was what the leaders were like. As regards those circles of the French bourgeoisie which were known as the Two Hundred Families, their mood is best of all characterised by the slogan they put forward: "better Hitler than the Popular Front".

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[1] W. Churchill. *The Second World War*, London 1949, Vol. 2, p, 176.

As a result France in 1938 was a second-rate great power and in the main followed in Britain's wake. The Third Republic was in a condition of demoralisation, and its best people looked into the future with fear. I have the following entry in my diary, made on September 16, 1938, in Geneva, to where I had gone for the meeting of the League of Nations Assembly.

"Maxim Litvinov spoke of his meetings... The talk with Herriot was of a directly tragic character. The most interesting and most vital thing in it was Herriot's frank admission that France was now no longer in a position to play the role of a really great power: its population was falling, its finances were in complete disorder, the internal struggle was sharpened to an extreme, its air force was run down, its links with Central and Eastern Europe had been undermined and were primarily of a nominal order. All this was very sad, but it was all, unfortunately, fact. Soon the moment would come when France would have to draw a conclusion of the situation."

The mood of British ruling circles and the situation in France after the May crisis were of course well known to Hitler. What conclusion could he draw? Only one: that he should continue his blackmail not losing any time. So a most shameful comedy was played out before the eyes of all Europe during two summer months of 1938. Negotiations were in progress in Prague between the Czechoslovak Government and Henlein on the settlement of the "Sudeten question". Chamberlain and Daladier demanded of Edvard Beneš, the Czechoslovak President: "Give in, give in to Henlein, as much as you possibly can!" At the same

time Hitler was instructing Henlein: "On no account agree to a compromise! Demand more and more!" At the negotiating table various "plans" for a settlement appeared from time to time. The first plan... the second... the third... Although, under these plans the Sudetenland would have become something in the nature of a state within a state, Henlein continued to be increasingly dissatisfied, for it was necessary to Hitler to keep the Sudeten question going for the time being as an apple of discord between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Not confining himself to questions of Czechoslovakia's domestic policy, Henlein began to demand that Prague repudiate the mutual aid pacts with the USSR and France...

Towards mid-July Hitler began to shout that "his patience was becoming exhausted", and that if the Sudeten question were not settled with the utmost urgency, he would take "direct action". On July 18. Hauptman Wiedemann, Hitler's personal aide, arrived in London and began to whisper in the ears of the Cliveden set (beginning with Chamberlain himself), that the Führer was beside himself and that any further procrastination over the settlement of the Sudeten question could have catastrophic consequences.

The British Premier panicked and then was immediately struck by a bright idea: to resolve the argument between Beneš and Henlein (for Henlein read Hitler) by means of arbitration. He even found a suitable man for the job, Lord Runciman. All this–the idea, the plan, the performer–was entirely the product of Chamberlain's initiative. That, however, did not prevent the Prime Minister from declaring on July 26 in the House of

Commons that Runciman was being sent to Prague in response to a request from the Czechoslovak Government—although such a request had never been made.

Who was Runciman? I had made his acquaintance during the Anglo-Soviet trade talks in 1932-34. At that time he had been the President of the Board of Trade. He was a big shipowner and as far as party affiliation was concerned he was a Liberal from Sir John Simon's reactionary group. He suffered from deafness and was slow to grasp things. Runciman did not like to work, he was of that class of British officials who rule but do not govern. During the trade talks which continued for 14 months, I saw Runciman only twice: on the day the talks opened and on the day the agreement was signed. Everything else done on behalf of the British was carried out by others. And now a man of such a disposition and character, and one approaching 70 at that, was supposed to act as arbiter in an exceptionally complex and difficult argument! How little Runciman was fitted for the job can be judged from this fact: Shortly before his departure for Prague, I met him at a diplomatic dinner and was amazed to find that he did not even know the geographical position of Czechoslovakia. Of course, Runciman was accompanied by various secretaries and advisers, but among them there was not one with a good knowledge of Czechoslovakia or who had experience in settling questions linked with the position of national minorities. But Chamberlain was not in the least bit worried: after all, he had decided in advance that the fate of Czechoslovakia was of secondary importance and that the main thing was peace and friendship with Hitler.

THE RUNCIMAN MISSION

Chamberlain was in so much of a hurry to get the Runciman mission set up that he did not even have time to agree on everything with Daladier. This aroused dissatisfaction among the French and objections to the British plan. Paris was particularly displeased at Runciman's investment with the powers of "arbiter". Chamberlain had to make a concession and Runciman, finally, went to Czechoslovakia with the title "adviser and intermediary" between Prague and the Sudetens (that is, in fact, Berlin). It was a very odd title, but no odder than the whole cowardly, treacherous venture of the British Prime Minister.

On August 4, 1938, the Runciman mission began its work in Prague. It was a highly original mission. Of course, the secretaries and advisers took books, documents, tables of statistics and all kinds of other material there from all over the place, since the mission, as has been pointed out earlier, did not really know Czechoslovakia well enough. Yet from the start the head of the mission behaved with the highest degree of self-importance. He looked upon the Czechs with condescension and kept his relations with them on a purely official basis. On the other hand he showed himself to be clearly drawn to the Sudeten barons, and on the pretext of "studying" their views and moods, willingly visited their castles, which were guarded by Henlein's storm-troopers. The whole spirit of the mission and all its activities left no room for doubt that it was continuing Chamberlain's line and that its "advice" to the Czechoslovak Government and people would boil down to the

same thing: "Make concessions and more concessions!"

In fact, by the end of his stay in Prague, Runciman had finally made up his mind about the idea that had been fermenting in his head (and in Chamberlain's) that "in the interests of preserving peace" the Sudetenland must be taken away from Czechoslovakia and handed over to Hitler's Germany."

Meanwhile time was passing and Hitler was making increasingly threatening gestures. He embarked on big manoeuvres with troop concentrations on the Saxonian and Silesian borders with Czechoslovakia. German propaganda presaged some major events in connection with the forthcoming nazi congress in Nuremberg on September 5.

The British and French governments continued to assure the public that nothing in particular was going on and that people might continue calmly enjoying their holidays at the seaside. The only sign of nervousness was the instruction sent just then to Neville Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin, suggesting that he ascertain the possibilities of a personal meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain.

Not even everybody in British ruling circles, of course, was in accord with Chamberlain. Here are a few extracts from my diary:

"August 16, 1938. Eden has talked a great deal with Masaryk about Czechoslovakia. He tried to persuade him not to give in... Prague's firm position will convince France to come to her defence. In the final count Britain will not be able to withold support from France... The only way to avert war is to create a London-Paris-Moscow

"axis" with a friendly rear in the form of the USA. But is Chamberlain really capable of this? His line is to ignore the USSR... But Halifax is finding a definite capacity for evolution... A rift is becoming noticeable between Chamberlain and Halifax.

"August 20. I met Lloyd George in the Houses of Parliament. I asked him about the positions of Britain and France if the Czech events took a serious turn. Lloyd George answered categorically: 'Neither the British Government nor the French will do anything really effective to defend Czechoslovakia from German aggression...'".

My own instinct told me the same thing.

"September 1. Yesterday Churchill invited me to dinner. He took the bull by the horns straight away. The European situation, he said, was extraordinarily serious. War could break out today or tomorrow... The most important thing was to prevent it. How? Churchill's plan was this. At the crucial moment when the talks finally found themselves in a blind alley and Hitler began to brandish his weapons, Britain, France and the USSR must hand Germany a collective note—precisely a collective note, Churchill emphasised, containing protests against the attack on Czechoslovakia... Such a *démarche*, which would undoubtedly receive moral support from Roosevelt, would scare Hitler and lay the basis for the London-Paris-Moscow 'axis.' Only the presence of such an 'axis' could save mankind from another war... What did I think of this plan? What would the Soviet Government's attitude be towards it?

"I replied that I could not speak for the Soviet Government. Personally I thought it was a good plan, but that it had no chance whatever of being

put into practice. I could not believe that Chamberlain would agree to act with the USSR against Germany."

My scepticism, unfortunately, proved more justified than Churchill's optimism or semi-optimism. The majority of those in British ruling circles at that time blindly followed Chamberlain and did not want to listen to the voices of their more far-sighted representatives.

THE FIRM GUARANTEE OF THE USSR

On September 3, 1938, I received an important telegram from Moscow. In it Maxim Litvinov reported to me his talk with Payart, the French *chargé d'affaires* (the French Ambassador was away), whom he had asked to convey urgently to the French Government that in the event of an attack by Germany on Czechoslovakia the Soviet Government would fulfil its obligations under the Soviet-Czechoslovak pact of mutual assistance concluded in 1935 and give armed assistance to Czechoslovakia. But under the conditions of that pact Soviet aid was only obligatory if France who also had a mutual aid pact with Czechoslovakia, at the same time took up arms against Germany. Consequently the Soviet Government wanted to know what were the intentions of the French Government in the present situation. For its part the Soviet Government proposed to call an immediate meeting of representatives of the Soviet, French and Czechoslovak General Staffs to work out the necessary measures to be taken.

Maxim Litvinov believed that Romania would allow Soviet troops and aircraft to cross her territory, but he considered that in order to bring influence to bear on Romania to this end it was very desirable to raise the question of eventual help to Czechoslovakia in the League of Nations as soon as possible. If in the League's Assembly even a majority voted in favour of assistance (strictly according to the Charter unanimity was required), Romania would follow the majority and would not object to the passage of Soviet troops.

In the circumstances this step taken by the Soviet Government was an act of tremendous political significance. The declaration of the Soviet Government brought a note of firmness, courage and far-sightedness into the atmosphere of cowardly confusion prevailing in the West. It was vital that it became known as widely as possible, for the Cliveden set had throughout August been engaged in a whispering campaign in political circles which boiled down to this: "We should be glad to come to the rescue of Czechoslovakia, but without Russia this is difficult to accomplish, and Russia keeps silence and is clearly reluctant to fulfil her obligations under the Soviet-Czechoslovak Mutual Aid pact."

I did not have instructions to publish the contents of the talk between Maxim Litvinov and Payart, but the form of the communication from the People's Commissar did not exclude the spreading of information about it in political circles.

On that same day, September 3, I visited Churchill in his country mansion at Chartwell and told him in detail about this step of the Soviet Government. Churchill immediately realised the im-

portance of what I had told him and said that he would presently bring it to the notice of Halifax (I could not do this myself since the People's Commissar had not proposed that I should get in touch with the Government on this point). Straight away, also on September 3, Churchill sent Halifax a letter in which, without mentioning my name, he informed the Foreign Secretary about the talk in Moscow. Churchill confirms this in the first volume of his war memoirs [1]. The next day I met Lloyd George and deputy Labour leader Arthur Greenwood and repeated to them what I had told Churchill. The outcome was as follows: the three Opposition leaders would undoubtedly tell their party colleagues about the steps taken by Litvinov and thus political circles in London would know the actual position of the USSR on so crucial and urgent a question. If any member of the British Government got the idea of distorting in Parliament or outside it the position of the USSR and falsely accusing it of "passivity on the Czechoslovak question" then there could be a reply from the Opposition that would restore the truth. That is what in fact happened.

On September 8 Halifax invited me to come and see him and asked whether I was going to Geneva for the opening of the League of Nations Assembly on September 12. After hearing that I was (the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs had summoned me there), Halifax asked me to convey to Litvinov his regret that he, Halifax, would not be able to meet Litvinov, for quite urgent matters kept him in London. This, however,

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[1] W. Churchill. *The Second World War*, Vol. 1, pp. 263-265.

was only an excuse for our meeting, for Halifax immediately began to question me in detail about the talks between Litvinov and Payart. Evidently Churchill's letter had made a definite impression on him and he wanted to check what Churchill had said by talking with me. Since the initiative for a talk on this particular theme came from Halifax, I saw no grounds for keeping silent and I gave him the details that I had already given to the Opposition leaders. This meant that by September 8 the British Government already had all the necessary information about the steps taken by the Soviet Government.

At about the same time I met the French Ambassador Corbin in London, at a reception, and I was astounded when a talk with him revealed that he knew nothing about Litvinov's talk with Payart. Usually Corbin very quickly received from Paris copies of the most important reports from the French Ambassador in Moscow. Yet almost a week had gone by and he was still in complete ignorance about the Soviet *démarche* at a moment so vitally important for France. What could it mean? I got the answer to this question only when I went to Geneva.

IN GENEVA

I arrived in Geneva on September 11, and on the 12th the League of Nations Assembly opened. The atmosphere was thick and explosive. It was the time when the nazi party rally was being held at Nuremberg and its sinister echoes were audible

in all corners of Europe. In the evening of September 12 Hitler was to make a major speech at Nuremberg which was expected to decide whether there would be war or not.

The only thing over which there were arguments, discussions and agitation was the importunate question: would there be war or wouldn't there?

There is an entry in my diary for September 25 which recalls a talk with Maxim Litvinov. The People's Commissar asked me: "Well, what do you think, will there be war or won't there? Yesterday we exchanged opinions: I consider that the British and the French will give way again and there won't be war; Yakov Zakharovich (Surits, the Ambassador in Paris) agreed with me. Boris Yefimovich (Stein, the Ambassador in Italy) took the opposite view. What do you say?"

At that moment Stein burst in and began to demonstrate that the Czechs would reject the ultimatum, that in the circumstances the British and French would not be able to put pressure on them, that the Germans would go onto the offensive, the French would be forced to support the Czechs, and that events would continue to snowball...

Subsequently there is this entry in my diary: "I listened, and Stein's reasoning appeared to me to be logically incontrovertible. But deep in my heart a voice asserted: 'Will Chamberlain and Daladier stand firm when it is essential to say straight out–War! I don't think they will.' And I replied to Maxim Litvinov: 'Knowing "my" British I am inclined to agree with you. However, in the present situation there are some uncalculable factors which could play a tremendous role–for example the behaviour of the Czechs at the moment of danger'."

I have two particularly clear recollections of that visit to Geneva.

I have already said that back in London I was most amazed at Corbin's complete ignorance of the *démarche* of Maxim Litvinov on September 2. In Geneva we learnt of even stranger things. It appeared that not only the French Ambassador in Britain but even members of the French Government knew nothing of it. How could this have happened? We began a careful "investigation" and what we discovered was this.

During the previous two months Bonnet, who wanted at all costs to get out of fulfilling France's obligations to Czechoslovakia, had been making intensive efforts to spread the rumour that France's "guarded position" on the Czechoslovak question was due to the "passivity" of the Soviet Union, which, it was said, either did not want to or could not go to the aid of its ally in the event of danger. The step taken by the Soviet Government on September 2 cut the ground from beneath this slander. Bonnet was alarmed and, in order to give himself an opportunity of continuing to lie, if only for the time being, he resorted to a scandalous piece of political roguery: he concealed Payart's despatch on the question not only from French political circles in general but even from the majority of the French Cabinet! When all this became clear, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs decided to take decisive and immediate action. On September 21 he made an important speech at the League of Nations in which he publicly repeated all that he had said nineteen days earlier in accordance with diplomatic formula to Payart, but adding a goodly quantity of scathing words about Bonnet in his

speech. It was a strong, clear speech. People listened with bated breath. For the first time ever the hall was full. The applause was loud and general. The stream of fresh air introduced by the Soviet representative into the hypocritical, suffocating atmosphere of the Assembly led to another episode.

On September 23, that is, two days after Litvinov's speech, the British representative at the Assembly, Lord de la Warr and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, R. A. Butler, invited Maxim Litvinov and myself to come and have an urgent talk about the situation in Europe. The meeting took place in the office of the permanent British delegate to the League of Nations.

Lord de la Warr was the first to speak. After painting a very gloomy picture of the political situation and expressing the view that Germany would in all likelihood attack Czechoslovakia, he asked what the position of the Soviet Union would be in such an event. Here I reproduce the note made in my diary for September 23:

"Maxim Litvinov replied that our position had been set out in full in his speech at the League of Nations Assembly: The Soviet Government was prepared to honour its obligations under the Soviet-Czechoslovak pact. The question was what France would do. Britain's attitude was also important.

"De la Warr also tried to ascertain from us whether the Soviet Government had yet taken any military measures.

"Litvinov replied that back on September 2, during talks with the French *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow, he had recommended urgent talks bet-

ween the General Staffs of the three armies. . . As regards Romania, Litvinov believed that if Britain and France supported Czechoslovakia, Romania would not want to be left out of it.

"De la Warr then stated that according to his information Romania was not intending to put obstacles in the way of Soviet troops going through to help Czechoslovakia. Then, turning to us, he asked what should be the next practical step.

" 'If the British Government', Litvinov replied, 'has seriously decided to intervene in this conflict which has now reached a culminating point, then the next step, in my view, must be an immediate conference of Britain, France and the USSR to work out a general plan of action.'

"De la Warr expressed agreement with this and asked what Litvinov thought would be a suitable venue for the conference.

"Maxim Litvinov said that the choice of venue was of secondary importance, with one proviso: it must not be in Geneva. Hitler was so used to identifying Geneva with idle chatter that a conference held there would not make a fitting impression on him. And the impression it made was now of paramount importance.

"Lord de la Warr and Butler acknowledged the correctness of this view, and de la Warr asked whether Litvinov had any objection to the conference being held in London. Litvinov said he had not.

" 'Who would represent the USSR at such a conference?' de la Warr continued. 'Could you come to it?'

"Maxim Litvinov replied: 'If Ministers repre-

sent the other countries at the conference I shall be prepared to come to London myself.'

"De la Warr announced himself fully satisfied with the talk and said he would immediately inform the Foreign Office of it. We were to talk further the next day, when he had received a reply from London."

As the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and I were returning to the *Hotel Richmond,* I said: "What you have just proposed to the British means war... Back in Moscow, has all that been well considered and decided in all seriousness?"

Maxim Litvinov said firmly: "Yes, it has been decided in all seriousness... When I was leaving Moscow for Geneva Soviet troops were concentrating on the borders with Romania and Poland. That was about two weeks ago. I think there are now at least 25 to 30 divisions there with corresponding numbers of planes, tanks, etc."

I asked: "And if France lets us down and does not act? What then?"

Litvinov waved his hand in irritation and snapped: "That's of secondary importance!"

"And what about Poland and Romania? Will they let our troops through?"

"Poland," he replied, "will not, of course, let them through, but Romania is another matter... We have evidence that she will, especially if the League of Nations, even if not unanimously as the Charter demands, but by a big majority, recognizes Czechoslovakia as the victim of aggression."

He was silent for a moment and then said: "The most important thing is how the Czechs will behave... If they are going to fight we shall help them with armed force."

There were serious grounds for such a sta-

tement. On September 25 the USSR's People's Commissariat for Defence had sent Vasilchenko, the Soviet air attaché in France, the following telegram: "You must meet Gamelin personally to thank him for information about the measures taken by the French Command and to convey the following:

"Our Command has so far taken the following preliminary measures:

1. Thirty rifle divisions have been moved up into areas directly adjoining the western border. The same thing applies to cavalry divisions.

2. Units have adequately been replenished with reservists.

3. As regards our technical troops—the Air Force and Armour, they are in complete readiness.

"Report the results immediately." [1]

On September 26 Vasilchenko carried out instructions.

So the Soviet Union was not going to confine itself to purely political and diplomatic measures. It was ready in the event of necessity to take up arms. Therefore all the more important was to establish close contact with Britain. . .

Alas! The meeting proposed by de la Warr did not take place the next day, nor the day after that, nor at any time at all. It was not our fault. The reason for it will become clear later. At that time vital events were taking place in Britain and France.

On September 7, 1938, *The Times* carried a sinister editorial, the essence of which was expressed in the following sentence:

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[1] *New Documents from the History of Munich*, Moscow, 1958, pp. 139-140.

"In that case it might be worth-while for the Czechoslovak Government to consider whether they should exclude altogether the project, which has found favour in some quarters, of making Czechoslovakia a more homogeneous state by the cession of that fringe of an alien population who are contiguous to the nation with which they are united by race."

This was an invitation to solve the Czechoslovak crisis by handing over the Sudetenland to the Third Reich. The Czechoslovak envoy in London, Jan Masaryk, immediately protested to the Foreign Office against *The Times* article and Lord Halifax considered it necessary to report through the press that the contents of this article did not reflect the views of the British Government. No one believed this, especially since, on September 6, the previous day, an article saying more or less the same thing had been carried in the Paris newspaper *La République,* which was known to be the mouthpiece of Bonnet. The European atmosphere became even more oppressive and Hitler, not without grounds, saw these articles as a symptom of the weakness of the Western governments, a sign that they were vacillating. As we now know, on September 9, he ordered an uprising to be staged on September 13-15 in the Sudetenland and Operation Green *(Fall Grün)*– armed attack on Czechoslovakia–to be carried out on September 30.

During the second week in September the French Government asked London whether France could firmly count on London's help if she fulfilled her obligations under the pact with Czechoslovakia. The answer was vague. This enabled Bonnet to carry out his pernicious propagan-

da on a wide scale–here two arguments played an important role. One was that France, in general, was not prepared for war, and was especially weak in relation to Germany in the air. By way of proof Bonnet used the evidence of certain French generals, and also statements made by the fascist-inclined American flyer Lindbergh, an extreme reactionary and at that time idol of the "Two Hundred Families". The second argument was the allegation that the Soviet Union was not disposed to carry out its obligations towards Czechoslovakia under the 1935 pact and that even if the Soviet Union wanted to give help, then it was not in a position to do so because of "weakness" of the Red Army. Bonnet also claimed that neither Poland nor Romania would let Soviet troops cross their territory, and he not only claimed this, but did everything he could to bring it about.

Eventually two groups formed in the French Cabinet: those who were in favour of armed assistance to Czechoslovakia (Mandel, Campinchi, Reynaud, etc.), and those who were against giving such help (Bonnet, Chautemps, De Monzie, and others). Daladier who back in spring had considered that France should fulfil her obligations to Czechoslovakia, was now undecided and devised this way out: immediately after Hitler's speech at Nuremberg he asked Chamberlain to take charge of Anglo-French activity in the situation.

Chamberlain seized upon Daladier's proposal. He saw in this "the hand of fate" and immediately set about realizing his cherished plans. The first step had to be a personal meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler (the ground for this had been explored since the end of August by Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin). On

September 15, 1938, the British Prime Minister went to Berchtesgaden for talks. He was accompanied by Horace Wilson and William Strang (now Lord Strang), a highly placed Foreign Office official. It is absolutely typical that although not one of the three could speak German, Chamberlain did not take an interpreter with him. Evidently he considered he could rely on an interpreter provided by the German side.

During that period a British cartoonist depicted the Prime Minister as a very unmilitary gentleman carrying an umbrella. Chamberlain always carried an umbrella. It was such a good cartoon and fitted the character of the head of the British Government that the expression "the man with the umbrella" stuck to Chamberlain and was repeated in endless variations.

ASTRIDE THE TIGER

So Chamberlain's dream came true. He at last had the opportunity to sit down with Hitler and with pencil in hand to go through, true not all, but the most vital claim of the Germans on the Western powers. However, as one might have expected, what happened diverged considerably from what Chamberlain had hoped, for it turned out that there were not two trading merchants at the table, as the British Premier had conceived it, but "the man with the umbrella", of a commercial turn of mind, on the one side, and a bandit on a world scale, bearing the fascist stamp, on the other.

Ridiculing Chamberlain, Churchill said at some point that the Prime Minister wanted to ride the tiger. This immediately became clear at Berchtesgaden. But the tiger Chamberlain met there proved not only out for blood, but quite a cunning beast. In his relations with the British Premier, Hitler did not simply growl threateningly, but quite cleverly used the method of the stick and the carrot. The stick was a very big one and the carrot very small. However, such a combination worked almost without a hitch where Chamberlain was concerned.

Hitler tried out this method for the first time—on this occasion with a certain degree of caution—at Berchtesgaden. Here he engaged, as usual, in a lengthy monologue in which he quite explicitly but in comparatively moderate terms, revealed his aggressive intentions in regard to the Sudetenland. Chamberlain remained silent for most part and confined himself to a few questions and remarks. At the end of a three-hour talk he expressed doubt whether it had been worth his coming to Berchtesgaden if the fate of Czechoslovakia had been decided in advance and there could be no talk of a compromise. This made Hitler change his tone immediately. He suddenly began to assure his guest that it was important for him to know whether Chamberlain recognized the principle of self-determination of nations with regard to the Sudeten Germans. If he did, then Hitler would not find it difficult to reach agreement with so commonsensical person as Chamberlain on the forms and methods of implementing this principle.

The British Prime Minister, who was eager to believe Hitler, declared that for an answer to so vitally fundamental a question he must return to

London for consultations from the Cabinet. The Führer accepted this as proper, displayed all external signs of respect for Chamberlain and agreed on a "friendly" basis that they would meet again in a few days to continue the talks. The nazi "carrot" had had its effect, and Chamberlain left Berchtesgaden with a growing sense of his messianic role.

On September 16 Chamberlain returned home. The following five days saw feverish activity in London, with the Government in almost constant session. On September 18 a meeting of British and French Ministers took place in London. There were major quarrels and disagreements, but finally Chamberlain and Bonnet won the day. The two governments worked out the so-called Anglo-French plan for solving the Czechoslovak question, the essence of which was as follows:

1. The Sudetenland was to be handed over to Germany (this referred to areas with a German population exceeding 50 per cent);

2. Czechoslovakia's new borders would be defined by a specially set up international body on which Czechoslovakia would be represented. This body would also organise the exchange of population where this was considered essential.

3. Czechoslovakia's pacts with France and the Soviet Union were to be annulled, but Czechoslovakia's new borders would receive international guarantees with Britain and France subscribing to them [1].

It is clear that the British and French governments in fact signed this at Hitler's demand and

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[1] *Correspondence Respecting Czechoslovakia,* September, 1938, London, 1938, Miscellaneous, pp. 8-9.

thus took upon themselves the responsibility of dismembering Czechoslovakia. But they were hoping to effect this painful operation calmly, without haste, with financial compensation for material losses and with the application of a certain anaesthetic in the form of an "international guarantee" of the new borders of the Czechoslovak state.

It remained to impose the "Anglo-French plan" on Prague. On September 19 it was handed to Edvard Beneš by Newton and De Lacroix, the British and French envoys in Czechoslovakia. The situation became tense in the extreme. In the event of its realisation the "Anglo-French plan" would deprive Czechoslovakia of all her fortifications along the German border (and they were quite solid ones) and would annul Czechoslovakia's pacts with France and the USSR, putting in their place only a vague promise of an "international guarantee" of her borders. Almost a million Czechs living in the Sudetenland would be in the position of a national minority within the Third Reich. Big material assets, including highly important industrial enterprises, would go over from Czechoslovakia to Germany.

The developments within Czechoslovakia made the situation even more complicated. At that time Czechoslovakia was a bourgeois democracy closely linked with the Western powers. The terrible threat that had arisen to the country's very existence as an independent state created great alarm among the people. S. Alexandrovsky, Soviet Ambassador in Prague, in a communication to Moscow dated September 22, 1938, reported that astounding scenes were taking place in Prague. Crowds were singing the national anthem and the Internationa-

le. Meetings were held, speeches were made about the hope of support from the USSR, appeals rang out for the country to defend itself, there were calls for parliament to be summoned. Demonstrators sent delegations to the Soviet embassy. S. Alexandrovsky wrote: "Today, between 3 and 4 a.m., we have just had a delegation of factory and office workers, elected by a meeting held in front of the embassy." [1]

But a very big role was played in Czechoslovakia in those days by the bourgeois parties, especially the Agrarian Party, whose head, Hodža, was Prime Minister, and one of its leading figures was Krofta, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Agrarians pinned their hopes on France and Britain and had a most unfriendly attitude towards the Soviet Union. The idea of turning to Moscow for help aroused bitter arguments in political circles. Hodža, for example, was an opponent of such help. Edvard Beneš' party—the Popular Socialists—wavered. The same kind of thing was to be seen among the Social Democrats.

For one and a half days there were constant meetings in Prague. On September 19, immediately after receiving the "Anglo-French" plan, President Beneš invited S. Alexandrovsky, the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, to come and see him and through him to ask the Government of the USSR to reply as quickly as possible to two questions: a) would the USSR, in accordance with the treaty, immediately come to Czechoslovakia's aid if France remained faithful and also gave help, and b) would the USSR give support to Czecho-

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[1] *New Documents from the History of Munich*, Moscow, 1958, pp. 129-130.

slovakia's appeal for aid in the League of Nations Council?

On the next day, September 20, Prague received a telegram from the Czechoslovak envoy in Moscow, Zdenek Fierlinger, which gave the following information:

"In reply to the question whether the USSR is prepared to give rapid and effective aid if France remains faithful to the pact, the Government (Soviet: *I.M.*) replies: 'Yes, immediate and effective aid'. To the second question—is the USSR prepared to fulfil its obligations under Articles 16 and 17 in the event of an appeal to the League of Nations—the Government replies: 'Yes, in every respect'." [1]

The answer was simultaneously sent to S. Alexandrovsky, who reported it to Edvard Beneš by telephone during a Czechoslovak Cabinet meeting on the "Anglo-French plan." The result was that Prague rejected the plan as unacceptable and for its part proposed that the point in dispute be settled by arbitration—as envisaged, incidentally, by the German-Czechoslovak treaty of 1925.

Government circles in London and Paris were in a great state of agitation, and Chamberlain and Bonnet were particularly displeased.

How could this little country dare to cause Europe so much trouble! To put the British Premier, who had exerted so much effort for its "salvation", in so difficult a position!

Although I was at that moment at the League of Nations Assembly the European news reached Geneva instantaneously and on the evening of

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[1] *New Documents from the History of Munich*, Moscow, 1958, p. 105.

September 21 I made the following entry in my diary: "There is no limit to Anglo-French baseness! Yesterday evening, on receiving the Czech answer proposing that the German-Czech disagreement be settled by arbitration, Chamberlain got together with Daladier and late at night (it is said to have been at 3 a.m.) the two Premiers, without consulting their Cabinets, sent the Czechoslovak Government an ultimatum: either Czechoslovakia adopted the 'Anglo-French plan', or London and Paris would throw her to the mercy of fate in the event of a German attack. The French also declared that in such a case they would not consider themselves bound by the conditions of the French-Czech pact. The Czechs were given six hours to reply. The Czechoslovak Cabinet met at night and remained in session until morning. Some members of the Government insisted that the ultimatum be rejected and that the struggle be waged against Germany with the sole help of the USSR. Others objected strongly, pointing out that in this case everywhere (in this sense meaning in Britain and France) there would be shouts about a war for the 'Bolshevization of Europe', from which Czechoslovakia could only suffer. Early in the morning of September 21 the Czechoslovak Government took the painful decision to accept the Anglo-French ultimatum."

After that the Hodža Cabinet resigned, and at a time when mass patriotic demonstrations were going on the "Cabinet of National Concentration" headed by General Syrovy came to power. This was in essence capitulation arising from the fears of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie. Yet the stand taken by the USSR opened up quite other prospects for the country. The Soviet Government,

officially and unofficially, had made it clear to the Czechoslovak leaders that it was ready to support Czechoslovakia against aggression by Hitler even if France refused to carry out her obligations under the Franco-Czechoslovak mutual aid pact. But the leaders of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie preferred capitulation. At the time they were powerful enough to carry through their decision.

In the interests of historical truth it should be stated that Chamberlain did not have it all plain sailing in carrying out his line. Every day information arrived from London, and this is what I wrote about on the subject in my diary: "September 14. Attlee (the Labour leader–*I.M.*) saw Chamberlain yesterday and insisted that there should be a joint declaration by Britain, France and the USSR on helping Czechoslovakia if Germany attacked. Chamberlain, however, found such a step 'inexpedient'. Eden visited Halifax, and Churchill went to see Chamberlain: they both demanded a clear statement of its position from the government, but without success...

"September 18. A Labour Party delegation went to see Chamberlain and insisted on a three-power declaration by Britain, France and the USSR. Once again the Prime Minister rejected this proposal... The delegation declared: 'It's now or never!' The Prime Minister agreed that it would be necessary sooner or later to fight Germany but he considered that the present time was not suitable. Then he began to 'scare' the Labour Party members. Hitler was supposed to have said to him straight out at Berchtesgaden: 'I'm 49, and I have set myself the aim of seeing that all Germans are united under the flag of the Reich before the end of my days... For the sake of this

I am prepared to risk a world war.' Not satisfied with this, the Prime Minister pleaded poverty. Britain, after all, was poorly armed and France, it seemed, did not have a good air force... Russia's intentions were not clear. Nothing remained but to give way...

"After the talk with Chamberlain the Labour Party delegation summoned the National Council of Labour (representatives of the Labour Party, the trade unions and the cooperative movement), which sat for a whole day. They decided to invite representatives of the French Socialists to London...

"Churchill, Eden and Sinclair (Secretary of State for Air–*I.M.*) held a meeting. They were all frantic, and decided to get in touch with the Labour Party representatives...

"September 21. Today Attlee and Greenwood had a further talk with Chamberlain and Halifax. The Labour leaders demanded a categoric change in British policy as regards Czechoslovakia. Incidentally, they stated that after reading Litvinov's speech at the League of Nations they were obliged to say outright that the information previously given them by Chamberlain about the position of the USSR was completely at variance with the speech of the Soviet People's Commissar... The Prime Minister was very embarrassed and made Bonnet his excuse. Attlee and Greenwood then turned to Halifax and pressed him to say whether the Soviet Ambassador had informed him of the position of the USSR before his departure for Geneva.

"Halifax was also embarrassed and replied that they had in fact had a talk between him and Maisky on this question in relation to Czechoslovakia

but that Maisky had confined himself to general phrases (in fact I had given him details of the essence of the talk between Litvinov and Payart on September 2). In conclusion Chamberlain told the Labour leaders that there could be no question of a change in British policy on the Czechoslovak question: this policy had been adopted by the Cabinet.

"September 22. In London yesterday evening, after Attlee and Greenwood had visited the Prime Minister, there was a joint meeting of the General Council of the TUC and the Labour Party executive committee. The Prime Minister's statement was received with dissatisfaction and it was decided to send a further delegation. Chamberlain declared that it was physically impossible for him to receive the delegation (he was flying to Godesberg to see Hitler). Instead it was received by Halifax. It included Dalton, Morrison and Citrine. The delegation demanded an immediate *démarche* in Berlin of Britain, France and the USSR. In this connection Dalton, referring to Litvinov's speech, called Bonnet a 'disgraceful liar'... Halifax's reply to the Labour demand was in effect: 'At the present time no European combination can prevent the suppression of Czechoslovakia... The demand of the workers' delegation can not be met.'

"The delegation reported to a joint meeting of the TUC General Council and the Labour Party Executive on the results of their meeting with Halifax. Regarding these results as unsatisfactory, the meeting decided to appeal to the country and to hold two thousand protest meetings against the Cabinet's policy the following week-end (September 24-25)".

The meetings were held. But at that time the weight of the Cliveden set was so great and Chamberlain's obstinacy so persistent that the British Government, despite the opposition, continued along its course to catastrophe.

On September 22 Chamberlain met Hitler again, this time in the small town of Godesberg on the Rhine. The reason for the change of place was given by the German side as the desire of the Führer to be courteous to the Premier: Godesberg was much nearer to London than Berchtesgaden.

THE NAZI TIGER

For the second time Chamberlain sat down at the table with Hitler, preparing, this time, in full earnestness, with pencil in hand to meet the German claims. He was filled with joyful hopes: as soon as he had fulfilled the apparently unrealizable demands of Hitler and forced the Czechoslovak Government to agree to hand over the Sudetenland to the Germans, the head of the Third Reich must be satisfied; consequently, there would no longer be a dangerous conflict, there would be no war; all that was necessary was only to seal the bargain between Germany and Czechoslovakia legally, the European crisis would be over, and everything would go back to normal. Chamberlain was so confident that things would turn out thus that this time, in addition to Horace Wilson and Strang, he took with him the head of the legal department of the Foreign Office, Sir William

Malkin, a great expert on drafting diplomatic agreements.

Disappointment was in store for the British Prime Minister. At Berchtesgaden Hitler had met Chamberlain face to face for the first time. During the next few days he closely studied the activities of the British Prime Minister, being in a position to assess him both as an individual and as a diplomatic partner. He had tried out his tactics, and now, in Godesberg, he considered that the moment had come to bring out the big stick. The following scene took place.

The British Prime Minister opened the talk. He set out in detail the "Anglo-French plan" and made it clear that he expected that a certain wariness towards Czechoslovakia would be shown in carrying it out. When the Prime Minister had finished, a queer silence prevailed at the table. Hitler acted as though he were disillusioned. Then he seemed to break out of his chains and began to shout angrily that "the Anglo-French plan" would no longer do, that its implementation would take too long and that the conditions were too complex and complicated. Then he declared that his patience was exhausted and demanded that the Sudetenland be handed over to Germany immediately, without any intermediate procedures.

Chamberlain was shocked, astounded, and frightened. He tried to protest cautiously to the Führer, whereupon the latter became even angrier or, rather, pretended to. He made a commotion, he shouted, he threatened to destroy Czechoslovakia. When, at the end of three hours "talk" of this kind Chamberlain rose, Hitler suddenly changed his tone sharply and with extreme gallantry expressed regret that the fog impeded

his guest's view of the beautiful Rhine and the delightful countryside around.

The following morning, September 23, after all that had happened the previous day, the British Prime Minister could not bring himself to meet Hitler personally but sent him a letter in which he expounded in detail everything he had tried (without noticeable success) to say to him during their personal meeting. Chamberlain now felt that sitting at the same table with the Führer was not as pleasant as he had once thought it would be. His letter sent Hitler into a fury, and his reply, full of abuse, was received by Chamberlain on the evening of that day. The British Prime Minister had no alternative but to send the Führer a short message saying that there was evidently nothing he could do in Godesberg and that he was therefore returning home. But Chamberlain would not have been Chamberlain if he had left matters there. No, even now, he continued to believe Hitler–a case of wishful thinking. Consequently in his "farewell" message Chamberlain asked Hitler to send him a memorandum which would precisely set out Hitler's present demands.

On that very day, September 23, the rumour got around Europe that there would be a break between Hitler and Chamberlain, and Lord de la Warr and R. A. Butler invited Litvinov and myself to come to see them urgently for talks about measures to fight aggression.

But at this point Hitler seemed to realize that the tiger had roared enough for the time being. On the morning of September 24 the Führer unexpectedly invited Chamberlain to visit him and personally handed him the memorandum he had asked for. The principal demand was the handing

over of the Sudeten areas with its predominantly German population to Germany on September 26-28. The British Prime Minister was agitated at the fact that the memorandum was in the form of an ultimatum and for the first time took the risk of uttering a few sharp words to Hitler.

In reply the Führer played out a deft comedy. He suddenly announced that he was prepared to postpone the date for the handing over of the Sudetenland to October 1 (that is, the day fixed for the previously mentioned operation "Green") and he introduced a few more insignificant concessions. Now, he exclaimed, there was no ultimatum whatever. Then he added pompously: "You are the only man to whom I have ever made a concession!"

Chamberlain was gratified. The Führer began once again to assure him that the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand in Europe. Now all Germans would be under the roof of the Third Reich. Hitler had nothing against Czechoslovakia. He did not want people who were not of German nationality to be living within Germany's borders. He also declared his readiness to subscribe to the international guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new borders as soon as the claims of Poland and Hungary on Czechoslovakia were settled.

Simultaneously with Hitler the reactionary governments of those two countries were demanding that Czechoslovakia cede to them some small areas with Polish and Hungarian minorities. On September 23 the USSR warned the Polish Government that if Polish troops crossed the Czechoslovak border the Soviet-Polish non-aggression

pact would be annulled without further warning. [1]

Hitler's assurances finally swayed Chamberlain who, on saying goodbye, took it upon himself to hand the Godesberg memorandum on to Prague. True, without any recommendations on his part.

The little carrot had done its job.

CHAMBERLAIN—THE BIG STICK OF HITLER

On September 24 Chamberlain returned to London. Now it was a question of what to do next. There were disagreements in government circles. At that moment, true, not for long, there was even a certain divergence of opinion between Chamberlain and Halifax.

The following entry appeared in my diary for September 24: "Hitler's memorandum was sent on to Prague from Godesberg by Chamberlain but the plane which should have delivered it to the Czechoslovak Government came down somewhere en route. Consequently Halifax today handed the memorandum to Jan Masaryk (in London). The following talk took place between them:

"Halifax: 'Neither I nor the Prime Minister considers it possible to give you any advice in connection with Hitler's memorandum. But personally I should like to say you, man to man: think well before you give a negative answer. The Prime Minister is convinced that Hitler wants only the

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[1] Cf. *Izvestia*, September 26, 1938.

Sudetenland and if he gets it he will not present any further demands'.

"Masaryk: 'And you believe this?'

"Halifax (sharply): 'I have told you that the Prime Minister is convinced of it.'

"Masaryk: 'If neither you nor the Prime Minister wants to give us any advice in connection with the memorandum, then in the circumstances what role is the Prime Minister playing?'

"Halifax: 'The role of postman, no more.'

"Masaryk: 'Am I to understand from you that the Prime Minister of Great Britain has turned himself into a messenger for that murderer and bandit?'

"Halifax (embarrassed): 'If you like, yes.' "

There was another meeting of the British and French Ministers in London on September 25 and 26. It began on a high note. The Godesberg memorandum was turned down by both powers (Prague did the same thing). Daladier proclaimed loudly the readiness of France to carry out her obligations to Czechoslovakia, while Halifax proposed that Britain firmly and openly declare its readiness to give France the utmost support in the event of war. Some other Ministers spoke out quite radically.

Information about the moods prevailing in England and France got into the press and political circles. Hitler learnt of them and decided that the big stick had to be brought into action once again. On September 28 mobilisation of the German army was proclaimed. Goebbels filled the ether of Europe with frenzied shouts about the evil of Czechoslovakia, the "intolerable" oppression of the Sudeten Germans, and about the fact that the Führer's decisive blow was not far off and "Teu-

tonic justice" was to be restored. The political temperature rapidly rose and this had an almost instantaneous effect.

The mood prevailing at the Anglo-French meeting in London began to deteriorate. Chamberlain and Bonnet moved to the fore. The idea of fighting against nazi aggression gradually faded. Finally the Anglo-French meeting adopted a quite well-sounding resolution, which boiled down to this: in the event of "unprovoked aggression" the two powers would act in concert. But the British Government, even so, did not give a firm promise to support France with armed force if as a result of carrying out her obligations to Czechoslovakia she were to be drawn into war. It was highly characteristic, too, that throughout the two days of the meeting not a word was spoken about joint action with the USSR, despite the speech made by Maxim Litvinov at the League of Nations. It was clear that in these circumstances there could be no question of continuing the talks between the British and French representatives which had begun on September 23 in Geneva.

It was at this very time that a most important meeting took place between Chamberlain and Baldwin, who was Chamberlain's predecessor as Prime Minister. Lloyd George told me about this meeting the following (I quote an entry in my diary for October 1, 1938): "A week ago Baldwin went to Chamberlain and told him: 'You must avoid war at all costs, at the price of any humiliation. Just think what would happen if matters went as far as war! Our utter lack of readiness would immediately become evident and then the indignant public would simply hang you and me from lampposts. . .'

Lloyd George declared that this idea played a very big role in Chamberlain's behaviour.

After the Anglo-French meeting had broken up, the finally frightened Chamberlain decided on his own responsibility and at his own risk to "make a last attempt to avert war." On September 26 he sent Horace Wilson to Berlin with a personal letter to Hitler which attempted to persuade the Führer to settle the question at the diplomatic table. Hitler, who that evening was to make a major speech in the Sportpalast, flately rejected Chamberlain's proposal and did not even consider it worth sending back an answer to the British Premier with Wilson. On September 27 Wilson returned to London in such a state of panic that the British Government on the same day announced certain mobilization measures. At the same time there began fresh, particularly strong pressure on Prague. Chamberlain demanded complete capitulation.

The following facts indicate how confused Chamberlain was. To begin with he sent Beneš the Godesberg memorandum indicating that in the circumstances the British Government did not consider it possible to give any advice. But in a few hours Chamberlain sent Beneš a second telegram which in fact insistently recommended that Beneš cease any resistance, for, he wrote, the only alternative would be German invasion and forcible dismemberment of the country, as a result of which Czechoslovakia, regardless of the outcome of the bloody conflict, would all the same not be able to regain her former borders.

On the same evening, September 27, the British Prime Minister made a broadcast speech which, to put it mildly, could scarcely evoke

a surge of firmness and courage among the British people. In that speech, by the way, were the sadly well-known shameful words: "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing." [1]

Indeed, that was a moment when before the mental gaze of Chamberlain everything was wrapped in gloom and hopelessness. And precisely at that moment Hitler dealt another deft psychological blow to the British Prime Minister. At about ten o'clock in the evening of September 27 the Prime Minister received from the German Embassy in London an answer from Hitler to the letter Wilson had handed to the Führer. Hitler again assured Chamberlain that the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand, that if the two of them succeeded in settling this question amicably, completely new prospects would open up to Europe, that an amicable settlement was quite possible, and that only those narrow-minded, obstinate Czechs were preventing all the difficulties from being overcome.

Hitler's calculations proved justified. This little carrot once more had its effects. Chamberlain's obstinacy stiffened once again and he immediately decided firmly that fate itself had chosen him as the saviour of the European peace. He replied to Hitler that he proposed the settlement of the Czechoslovak question at a "conference of four". For this purpose he was ready to travel to Germany once again. The French Government supported Chamberlain's initiative. To win Hitler for

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[1] *The Times*, September 28, 1938.

this plan, the British Prime Minister turned for help to Mussolini. Bonnet did the same. The Rome dictator, fearing that Hitler was about to drag him into a European war, for which he did not consider himself ready, supported the convening of such a conference and persuaded Hitler to postpone the mobilization of German troops scheduled for September 28 for another twenty-four hours. . .

On September 27 the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs said to me in Geneva: "Set off for London immediately! At the moment you're needed more there than here. . ."

In the evening of that day I left Geneva for Paris and the next day arrived in London. I went straight from the station to the Houses of Parliament and I got there precisely at the "historical moment." Chamberlain was finishing his speech. He waved a piece of white paper he had received as he was speaking: it was an invitation from Hitler to come to Munich the next day, September 29, for "the conference of four".

MUNICH

September 29, that tragic day when the fate of Czechoslovakia was decided at Munich, Halifax invited me to come to the Foreign Office, and made an attempt, if not to justify himself, then to explain why Britain had sat down at this conference without USSR. Here is his own record of this explanation.

"We all had to face facts and one of these

facts was, as he (that is, myself–*I.M.*) very well knew, that the heads of the German Government and of the Italian Government would not be willing in present circumstances to sit in conference with Soviet representatives. It seemed to us vital, as I believed it would to him, that, if war was to be avoided, we must somehow or other get matters on to a basis of negotiation. It was this conclusion that had led the Prime Minister to make his appeal yesterday to Herr Hitler for a conference, to which if Herr Hitler so desired, others could be invited." [1]

This was real evidence of bankruptcy, presented to the British Government by its own Foreign Secretary! "If Herr Hitler so desired"...

I did not conceal then from Halifax my feelings on what I had heard from him, and in general on Chamberlain's policy. Unfortunately, Halifax "forgot" to give an account of my reaction in his official record of our talk.

The explanation given by the British Foreign Secretary, incidentally, exactly conveys the very spirit of the Munich conference. Hitler and Mussolini were then on the crest of a wave while Chamberlain and Daladier were in the doldrums as regards moods and possibilities. We saw the state the British Prime Minister was in as he set off for Munich. Daladier was in no better condition. This is how one diplomat who was present at the Munich conference, described his mood. "The French, including Daladier, were resolved to reach agreement at any cost. They were a harried lot of men who showed no sign of shame

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[1] *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Third Series, Vol. 2, London, 1949, pp. 623-624.

at being parties to the dismemberment of their ally."[1]

This was written by Ivone Kirkpatrick, who was then First Secretary of the British Embassy in Berlin and was present at the Munich conference as an interpreter. Subsequently, after the war, he occupied the quite responsible post of Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

The confused state of both Prime Ministers can be seen from the following fact: before Munich they did not even meet to agree on their actions at the conference. Hitler and Mussolini, on the other hand, appeared at Munich after they had held a meeting on the Austrian border.

In view of all this Hitler decided to wield the big stick again. In Munich he played the role of the tiger unleashed: he stormed, he shouted, he expressed extreme impatience and made no attempt to conceal his contemptuous attitude towards Chamberlain and Daladier. In such an atmosphere neither Premier even risked raising his voice against any of the points in the agreement which were under discussion (if it could be called an agreement at all). At the conference table everything took place with the speed of machine-gun fire: it began at 1 p.m. on the 29th and finished at 2.30 a.m. on the 30th, including breaks for breakfast, dinner and other necessary matters. In less than thirteen hours the fate of Czechoslovakia was decided and not only the fate of Czechoslovakia!

Two representatives of the Czechoslovak Government were summoned to Munich during the day of September 29. They were A. Mastny, Cze-

[1] Ivone Kirkpatrick, *The Inner Circle*, London, 1959, p. 128.

choslovak envoy in Berlin, and Hubert Masaryk, a highly placed official at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They were not invited in order to sit down at the table at "the conference of four," on the contrary, they were only to listen to the sentence–and not even in the name of the entire conference: the Germans and Italians left the conference room and only then did Chamberlain and Daladier receive the Czech representatives. Daladier was very short and sharp while Chamberlain engaged in high-flown hypocritical phrases. What the two Prime Ministers said boiled down to what Ashton-Gwatkin, one of Chamberlain's colleagues, expressed briefly in a talk with Czechoslovak representatives as "if you do not accept, you will have to settle your affairs with Germany completely on your own. . ."

During the talks Daladier dozed, lolling back in an armchair, and Chamberlain yawned. Later the British Prime Minister stated that at the time he had been "very weary, pleasantly weary".

The Munich "sentence", which gave Czechoslovakia into the hands of the aggressor, was delivered by the Czechoslovak delegate to Prague early in the morning and then the Czechoslovak President and Government were confronted with the crucial question: what to do? It was quite obvious that Britain and France had washed their hands of the matter and that any fight against the Munich diktat was possible only with the support of the USSR. For reasons referred to earlier, the Czech leaders of that time did not decide to take this line. The alternative was capitulation. The ruling circles of the country capitulated, capitulated hurriedly and in disorder, losing their bor-

der fortifications, their factories, buildings and stores, their institutions and organisations situated in the Sudetenland. The Czech population of these areas fled, leaving their possessions behind.

That was how the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie of the day behaved, not having the courage to take action against Germany in alliance with the "Bolsheviks". But there were people of another stamp in the country, a striking example of whom was Ludvik Svoboda, who is now President of Czechoslovakia. At that time he was a battalion commander in the Czechoslovak army. He did not obey the Government's order for capitulation to Hitler's aggression but took his units to Poland and then to the USSR, where he began to fight against the fascists.

At that time Chamberlain was rounding off his shameful action with a hypocritical flourish. On the morning of September 30 without a word to Daladier or any of his closest associates, he asked for an audience with Hitler and requested him to sign an Anglo-German declaration the essence of which was as follows: We have reached the firm decision that the method of consultation has become the method established for reviewing all other questions which may affect our two countries, and we are fully determined to continue our efforts to eliminate possible sources of disagreement and thus to facilitate the ensurance of peace in Europe. [1]

The Führer was surprised but raised no objections. Why should he? He had got what he wanted and could indulge himself at the expense

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[1] *The USSR in the Fight for Peace on the Eve of the Second World War*, Moscow, 1971, p. 22.

of giving Chamberlain a spoonful, a very tiny spoonful of honey. The declaration was signed on the spot. On returning to his hotel, the British Prime Minister, slapping his hand against his side pocket, exclaimed rapturously: "I've got it!" [1]

It was this insignificant scrap of paper, which Hitler was to tear to pieces in six months, that Chamberlain displayed grandly to the crowd that met him at London Airport, proclaiming that it guaranteed "peace in our time".

Daladier did not bring back any such a prize, but Bonnet who did not go to Munich, organised a magnificent welcome for him in Paris.

In my diary for September 30 there is the following entry: "Yesterday I did not sleep until 4 a.m. but sat by the radio. At 2.45 a.m., at last, it was announced that agreement had been reached at Munich and that peace in Europe was assured. But what an agreement! And what a peace!

"Chamberlain and Daladier capitulated in full. The conference of the four in fact accepted the Gotesberg ultimatum with minor insignificant changes. The only success for Britain and France was that the Sudetenland would not be transferred to Germany on October 1, but on October 10. What a world-shattering achievement!

"I paced the dining room from end to end for a long time, all the time thinking things over. They were oppressive thoughts. It was difficult to grasp immediately the real significance of what had just happened, although I felt and understood that this night some historic milestone of immense importance had been passed.

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[1] Ivone Kirkpatrick. *The Inner Circle*, p. 130.

"With one step quantity had become quality, and the world had immediately changed. . .

"In the morning I got up with a heavy head, and the first thing that came into my mind was that I had to go to see Masaryk.

"When I entered his reception room there was no one there. After a minute I heard hasty footsteps on the stairs and Masaryk came in somehow sideways. There was something strange and unnatural in his tall, powerful figure. It was just as if it had suddenly been turned to ice and had lost its accustomed mobility. Masaryk cast a quick glance at me and began in his normal flat society tone: 'What fine weather we're having today, aren't we?'

"To hell with the weather,' I involuntarily waved a hand. 'I haven't come to you about that. I have come to express deep sympathy and profound indignation at the shameful behaviour of Britain and France at this exceptionally grievous moment for your people.'

"A kind of electric shock seemed to galvanise Masaryk's tall figure. The ice instantly vanished, and he shook off his immobility. He seemed to sway in the air and suddenly, altogether unexpectedly, fell against my breast, sobbing bitterly. I was overcome and a little embarrassed. Kissing me through his tears, Masaryk muttered: 'They have sold me into slavery to the Germans, as they used to sell the Negroes into slavery to America.'

"Gradually Masaryk calmed down and began to apologize for his display of weakness. I shook him warmly by the hand."

Under the same date I wrote later: "In the middle of the day I was invited to visit Cadogan and was briefly informed of the Munich decisions. . .

Then he began to cross-question me persistently about what I thought of those decisions.

"I did not beat about the bush but told him quite sharply that I considered Munich a terrible defeat for Britain and France, that on the previous evening an important historic milestone had been passed which marked the beginning of a new epoch in European history, the epoch of German hegemony, and that the result would be a chain of further retreats by 'the Western democracies'."

So far, in setting out the history of the Munich drama, I have scarcely mentioned the United States. Does that mean that the great transatlantic power had no connection with it, that it bears no responsibility for the victory of fascism and the defeat of the democratic forces?

No, quite the contrary. The United States played an extremely big and highly negative role during the days of Munich, but it acted under a thicker veil than did Britain and France. Washington had greater possibilities for this.

THE POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES

On October 5, 1937, Roosevelt made a major speech in Chicago, in which he said, among other things: "When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease." [1]

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[1] *New York Herald Tribune*, October 6, 1937, p. 2.

From this the President deduced quite logically that in the interests of preserving peace, all countries which did not want war must cooperate to establish a "quarantine" around the aggressors. But he stopped here. His speech did not contain a single word about how to accomplish this task, it did not put forward any practical proposals for organising such a "quarantine".

Furthermore, the next day, October 6th, Roosevelt held a press conference at which he began to explain the meaning of his previous day's speech. In essence the explanation was that the United States was by no means preparing to contribute to a collective rebuff to the aggressors, and was not thinking at all of repealing or modifying the 1935 law on neutrality. [1]

So what, then, did Roosevelt's speech in Chicago mean? In fact it was only a declaration stimulated in the main by various considerations of the home policy, in particular the desire to calm somewhat American public opinion, which was agitated by Hitler's antics.

If one investigates the speeches and activities of Roosevelt and his closest associates throughout 1937 and 1938, then one and the same thing is clear everywhere. There were loud words about fighting the aggressor and almost no practical steps in this direction. This impression was strengthened still more when one heard all the time from American leaders: "We are ready for

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[1] The Neutrality Act of 1935, which was adopted under strong pressure from the isolationists, placed a ban on American citizens, institutions and organisations from selling weapons to the belligerents in the case of war, regadless of who was the aggressor and who the victim of aggression.

any action short of war." They could not possibly have uttered those last three words, had they seriously thought of doing battle with aggression, for international bandits of the type of Hitler and Mussolini could understand only one kind of argument: fisticuffs.

Roosevelt's words "short of war" as a fundamental slogan for the present and the near future were taken by the aggressors as the green light for the urgent implementation of more and more acts of aggression. Quite independently of the subjective intentions of the American President, his "short of war" policy objectively had the most harmful consequences for peace. The leaders of American policy, however, did not understand this (or they did not want to) and therefore shouldered a great deal of the responsibility for both Munich and for all its consequences.

Roosevelt and other American leaders ascribed their policy to the need to reckon with the strong isolationist mood of the American people. It is true that there was such a mood during those years, but there was already a strong suspicion that the ruling clique in the United States was consciously exaggerating the seriousness of such a mood because of political calculation, and everything that came to light during and after the Second World War confirmed such suspicions.

While speaking out officially against fascist aggression, America's political leaders at the same time encouraged "European pacifiers". This was mainly done through the American Ambassadors in Berlin, Paris and London. I am particularly well acquainted with the activity of Joseph Kennedy, the American Ambassador in

Britain (father of the late President John Kennedy), who occupied this post from 1938. On his arrival in London he immediately landed in Lady Astor's salon (she was American by birth), and was soon the idol of the Cliveden set. Kennedy inspired it and in fact recommended to it the policy of "appeasing" the aggressors.

Immediately after the fall of France, at the end of June, 1940, Kennedy came to see me for talks on the nearest prospects in Europe. He was in a state of panic, he considered Germany invincible, and he recommended that Britain agree to even a poor peace with Hitler as soon as possible. Kennedy was dumbfounded when I began to demonstrate to him that Britain had every chance of holding out and even being victorious, if, of course, she really wanted to fight Germany. As he left, Kennedy exclaimed: "Well, you're an optimist! I've never met such an optimist even among the British. . ."

I was not surprised! After all the British Kennedy mixed with were the Cliveden set, and these were men and women who did not believe in their people and trembled before Hitler's boots.

When today, many years later, one considers Kennedy's messages to Washington, which were published in official US documents, it is clear how far he was imbued with the Chamberlain spirit during the days of Munich. Immediately after Chamberlain's return from Munich, Kennedy said that the British people should erect a statue in gold to their Premier since he had saved them from war.

William Bullit, American Ambassador in Paris, was an enemy of the Soviet Union and he met Daladier on his return from Munich with a lu-

curious bouquet of flowers. As regards Wilson, the US Ambassador in Berlin, he considered his chief mission to be to do everything possible to whitewash Hitler in the eyes of Washington and to tone down the impression made by the crimes and violence of the German Nazis.

It was of course only possible to have such American Ambassador in key European countries and to let them behave in such a way at the important historical moment if the central leadership in Washington found such a thing normal. And so it was. Among the many diplomatic documents published by the State Department after the war, there is one telegram sent by President Roosevelt to Chamberlain on September 28, 1938, when it was announced that the British Prime Minister would be flying to Munich the next day. This telegram consisted of just two words "Good man." [1]

AFTER MUNICH

How did Britain react to Munich?

The first day there was a general spontaneous sigh of relief: there would not be war, bombs would not drop from the sky, Chamberlain was the saviour of the nation; his residence in Downing Street was strewn with bouquets of flowers sent from all over Britain. The House of Commons endorsed the Munich Agreements with a majority of 366 to 144; supporters of the Prime Minister

[1] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. I, Washington, 1955, p. 688.

who had been wavering once again acquired confidence in their leader—the best example of them being Halifax. I have already related how during the last few weeks before Munich there had been doubts at the British Foreign Office about the correctness of the Prime Minister's line. Now, he threw those doubts into the wastepaper basket and even lapsed into a state of some kind of optimistic rapture.

Among the diplomatic documents seized as trophies by the Soviet Army in Germany, there is a record of a talk between Herbert von Dirksen, German Ambassador in London, with Halifax on August 9, 1939. Halifax said that "after Munich he was convinced that world peace was secure for 50 years." [1]

On the very next day, however, the mood began to change. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Duff Cooper, a known Conservative, demonstratively resigned, and made a sharp attack on Chamberlain's policy in Parliament. Although the Government received a big majority (party discipline played a role here), the general course of the debate did not go well for it. The ovation prepared by the Conservatives to greet the Prime Minister's appearance in the Chamber was a flop. In the discussion, which at times assumed a stormy character, more than 60 MPs spoke.

Here is an entry for my diary dated October 6: "The speeches made from the Government bench were mostly unsuccessful. Chamberlain was agitated, excited, lost the thread of his discourse, could not handle the many shouts and remarks

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[1] *Documents and Materials from the Eve of the Second World War*, Moscow, 1948, Vol. 2, p. 146.

from the opposition benches and altogether was very weak... Inskip, Burgin and Hoare in the House of Commons and Halifax and Stanhope in the Lords did not win any laurels either. Hoare was simly impossible, he got mixed up, fiddled with his spectacles, and spoke some senseless phrases... According to Burgin it appeared that in essence nothing special had happened, that everything was fine in this best of all worlds, and that the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia which had been sanctioned at Munich was nothing but "a slight modification of borders" in Central Europe, arising from the principles of justice and self-determination... But all these were Ministers. The backbenchers preferred to remain silent. Not even all the Ministers spoke; Elliot, Stanley, Hore-Belisha and others were as silent as the grave. Elliot even tried not to sit on the front bench... Those of the MPs who spoke were in the main representatives of the Opposition and the Conservative rebels... There were particularly strong speeches from Churchill and Morrison (the Labour leader). The latter's speech evoked a protest from the German Ambassador in London... Summing up the debate, Parliamentary old hands drew conclusion that things had gone against the government–the best evidence of this was the government's decision not to hold an election in the near future."

This was in Parliament. But the man in the street had something else to say: "Of course, it's good that there won't be war. But won't all this Munich story later on boomerang against us?"

Yes, day after Munich many people in Britain felt anything but victors. There was awkwardness,

alarm, and anxiety for the future in millions of hearts. It was because of this that the Prime Minister's supporters exerted every effort to lay the blame for Munich on the Soviet Union. Here is a typical example.

On October 10, 1938, a few days after the Munich betrayal, one member of Parliament, Lord Winterton, tried to explain in a speech at a public meeting that it was inevitable that Britain make concessions to Hitler because of the Soviet Union's military weakness and its reluctance, consequently, to fulfil its obligations under the mutual aid pact with Czechoslovakia.

I immediately protested to Halifax and had a statement from the Soviet Ambassy published in the press, quoting the speech made by Maxim Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, in the League of Nations, and thus refuting Winterton's slander. But it did not have a calming effect on Winterton. Two days later, at another public meeting, he once again repeated his invention. Then I handed out another statement to the press which said that it was pointless to quarrel with a man who deliberately closed his eyes to the truth, and that no amount of repetitions of lies could turn them into the truth.

The polemics between the Soviet Embassy and a member of the British Government attracted attention in the inflamed atmosphere of those days. Labour Party members conducted a cross examination in Parliament, and Chamberlain, like it or not, had to repudiate Winterton. . .

After Munich the shade of Hitler hung over Czechoslovakia, and not only over the part handed over to Germany, but over all the rest of the country, which still considered itself independent.

One result of this was that on October 5, 1938, President Beneš resigned. Jan Masaryk, who in these critical days showed great courage and dignity, could not remain Czechoslovak Ambassador in London any longer and also resigned. The last time I came up against the question of Munich in practice was in Geneva, at the end of May 1939. The 105th session of the League of Nations Council was to be held just then. According to the established order of things, the representative of the USSR was due to preside at this session, and the Soviet Government delegated this responsibility to me.

In the eight or so months which had elapsed since Munich, there had been a sharp turn in the fate of Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1939, Hitler, who had sworn to Chamberlain at Munich that the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand in Europe, conducted a blitzkrieg on Czechoslovakia and transformed it into "the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia", and "independent Slovakia". The Munich agreement had been torn up, but Britain and France, having taken upon themselves at Munich an obligation to guarantee the integrity and inviolability of Czechoslovakia after the Sudeten amputation, did not lift a finger. However, Edvard Beneš, from Chicago, where he had gone on retirement and where he was reading lectures at the University, sent the League of Nations a vigorous protest against the latest crime of the Nazis and asked that the question of Czechoslovakia be placed on the agenda of the 105th session of the League Council. At the same time Beneš sent a copy of his telegram to the Governments of the USSR, France and some other powers.

When on my arrival in Geneva I discussed

with M. Avenol (France) who was then General Secretary of the League of Nations, the agenda for the forthcoming Council Session, we naturally came to Beneš' telegram. Avenol waved his hand contemptuously and snapped out: "Well, that's for the archives."

"What do you mean for the archives?" I said, getting angry. "This Council meeting will be the first since Hitler seized Czechoslovakia. It cannot ignore such a blatant case of aggression!"

Avenol, with a superior look, began to instruct me that, according to procedure adopted by the League of Nations, only documents coming from governments could be raised at its sessions, and since Beneš was no longer President of Czechoslovakia, but a professor in Chicago, his telegram was that of a private individual, and consequently, did not have to be read to the session. Avenol quoted the Swedish Foreign Minister, Sandler, who had been Chairman of the Council before me. The telegram had arrived at the League while Sandler was in office, and he had agreed with Avenol that it could not qualify as a document for consideration by the League of Nations. The new chairman (myself) had no right to revise the decision of his predecessor.

I was highly indignant at all this soulless casuistry and, remembering the inveterately pro-Munich mood of Avenol, I replied sharply, telling him that my view of the telegram and its status differed radically and that I would do everything I could to announce it at the Council Session.

Avenol flew into a rage, and hissing and spitting, began to scream that it was customary on points of controversy for the League to follow the advice of the General Secretary.

I looked at Avenol and I said:

"I ask you, M. Avenol, to bear in mind that you see before you a chairman who considers that the General Secretary should follow the advice of the chairman. In this case my advice is this: If one point of procedure forbids the reading of Edvard Beneš' telegram, then we have to find another point which will permit it."

As he listened to my words, Avenol went red and white in turn, and finally, scarcely able to breathe, exclaimed: "I know by heart all the articles of procedure... The kind of article you require is not there!"

I laughed and replied: "We'll see."

After my meeting with Avenol I made enquiries among competent people, and, of course, found a suitable clause. The next day, at the Session of the League's Council, I announced: "Not as chairman of the present Session of the Council, but as the representative of the Soviet Government I have the honour to read to you a telegram received by my government from Edvard Beneš, former President of the Czechoslovak Republic."

I read the protest of Edvard Beneš. Sitting at my side, Avenol almost choked with fury, but he could do nothing. Immediately afterwards I proposed that Beneš' telegram be distributed to all League members as material for the forthcoming League Assembly which was to open in September 1939.

Sitting at the table, Halifax, Bonnet, and other Council members maintained a gloomy silence, staring at the green baize. I took advantage of their confusion and before any of them could pull himself together, I hastily said: "Any comments?... No! Good!"

In this way the question of Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia was placed on the agenda of the 105th Session of the League of Nations Council, and was even referred for consideration to the next League Assembly.

This was not very much, but in the circumstances nothing more could be achieved.

* * *

Munich was a tremendous historic drama not only for Czechoslovakia, but for all mankind. And at the same time it was a severe trial for the great powers. It was a test of the honesty, farsightedness and courage of their policy in international affairs. What were the results of this trial?

Nothing that has been said here leaves the slightest doubt that not one of the capitalist powers involved in the Munich drama stood up to the test, it reveals the depravity of their policy. Only the Soviet Union, the one socialist country in the world at that time, proved equal to the situation.

И. М. МАЙСКИЙ

МЮНХЕНСКАЯ ДРАМА

на английском языке

Цена 22 коп.